United Nations S/2018/502

Security Council

Distr.: General
2[illegible] May 2018

[illegible]ginal: English

Children and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) and subsequent resolutions, is the sixth report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It covers the period from 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2017 and the information provided focuses on the six grave violations committed against children, the perpetrators thereof and the context in which the violations took place.

The trends and patterns of grave violations against children by all parties to the conflict are set out in the report and the worsening impact of armed conflict on children is underlined. Details are also provided regarding progress made in addressing grave violations against children, including through the implementation of the action plans signed between the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Nations.

The report concludes with a series of recommendations to end and prevent grave violations against children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and improve the protection of children.

18-08487 (E) 220618

Please recycle

I. Introduction

1. The present report, submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) and subsequent resolutions, is the sixth report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and covers the period from 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2017. It contains information on the trends and patterns of grave violations committed against children since the previous report of the Secretary-General (S/2014/453) and an outline of the progress and challenges since the adoption by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict of its conclusions on children and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in September 2014 (S/AC.51/2014/3). Where possible, parties to the conflict responsible for grave violations are identified in the report. In that regard, in the annexes to the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, issued in August 2017 (A/72/361-S/2017/821), the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo — FARDC) are listed for rape and other forms of sexual violence against children. In addition, 12 non-State armed groups are listed for one or more grave violations against children.

2. Owing to security and logistical constraints, access for monitoring and reporting activities remained limited in certain areas, particularly in Maniema, Tanganyika, Kasai, Kasai Central and Kasai Oriental Provinces. The information contained in the present report is thus only indicative partial representation of the full extent of grave violations committed against children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

II. Overview of the political and security situation

3. The reporting period witnessed political tensions, including the debate over a potential third term for the President, Joseph Kabila Kabange; the conclusion, on 18 October 2016, of the national dialogue to reach consensus on the electoral process; the denunciation by part of the opposition of the political agreement to hold presidential, legislative and provincial elections by April 2018; the end of the President's second mandate, according to the constitutionally mandated presidential two-term limit, on 19 December 2016; and the conclusion on 31 December 2016 of a new political agreement to govern the transitional period until the holding of elections.

4. Against the backdrop of an uncertain and complex political transition, the security situation deteriorated in the volatile east of the country and the previously calm Kasai region. The presence and activities of more than 130 armed groups in the east, in particular in Ituri, as well as in North and South Kivu, remained a major source of insecurity and violence against children. Notwithstanding continued military pressure from FARDC, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and its ongoing disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, reintegration and resettlement operations, new armed groups emerged and existing groups shifted alliances and splintered. Ethnic tensions increasingly drove the conflict, as community-based violence and inter-ethnic clashes spread to Tanganyika in 2016, and the ethnic affiliations of armed groups in North and South Kivu took on more central roles in their modus operandi. The reporting period was also tragically marked by the deadliest single attack on a United Nations peacekeeping mission in recent history: on 7 December 2017, in Semuliki (Beni territory, North Kivu), resulting in the death of 15 peacekeepers from the United Republic of Tanzania.

5. As at the end of December 2017, 4.49 million people were internally displaced across the country, including 2.7 million children, with an estimated 13.1 million people, including 7.9 million children, currently in need of protection and humanitarian assistance. Insecurity hampered humanitarian access to parts of the Kasais, Tanganyika, South Kivu and Maniema.

North Kivu

6. In North Kivu, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), Nduma défense du Congo-Sheka (NDC-Sheka), Mai-Mai Raia Mutomboki factions and Nyatura groups continued to pose a serious threat to civilians and committed numerous human rights abuses, notwithstanding ongoing operations by FARDC and MONUSCO to neutralize those armed groups. In 2015, Nduma défense du Congo-Rénové (NDC-Rénové), a splinter group composed of former NDC-Sheka elements, began to spread its influence, in particular to mining sites. In mid-2016, the command structure of FDLR split, creating the Conseil national pour le renouveau et la démocratie-Ubwiyunge under a former FDLR commander. Those splits and the proliferation of armed groups contributed to a deteriorating and increasingly complex security environment.

7. In Walikale, Lubero and Rutshuru, the number of ethnically motivated attacks against both civilians and opposing armed groups by FDLR (Hutu ethnicity), NDC-Rénové (Nyanga ethnicity) and various Mai-Mai groups (mainly Mai-Mai Mazembe (Nande ethnicity) and Nyatura (Hutu ethnicity)), rose in 2015 and escalated in 2016 and 2017, leading to a further deterioration of the security situation and displacing entire communities. Retaliatory killings and abductions had a devastating impact on children. One of the most worst incidents took place on 27 November 2016, in Luhanga (Lubero territory), when Mai-Mai Mazembe attacked a camp of internally displaced persons, resulting in the killing of 18 children and the maiming of 14 children.

8. In Beni territory, while joint FARDC-MONUSCO operations weakened ADF, brutal attacks against civilians continued between 2014 and 2016. Attacks on 11 and 15 December 2014 in two villages near Oicha resulted in the killing of some 30 civilians, including children, who were hacked to death with machetes. On 13 August 2016, presumed ADF elements massacred at least 50 civilians, including children, in the Rwangoma and Beni areas, on the border with Virunga National Park. In late 2017, ADF appeared to shift strategies from attacks on civilians to targeting FARDC and MONUSCO along the Mbau-Kamango axis. In Lubero territory, Mai-Mai groups became increasingly active in October 2016, primarily attacking state security forces.

South Kivu

9. In the Ruzizi Plain of South Kivu, 2014 was marked by clashes between Mai-Mai Yakutumba, Mai-Mai Raia Mutomboki and FARDC. The massacre in Mutarule on 6 June 2014, in which 34 civilians were killed, including 12 children, marked a rise in inter-ethnic conflict, particularly abductions and killings. In Uvira and Fizi territories, Mai-Mai Yakutumba and Mai-Mai Raia Mutomboki resurged in 2016 and 2017, resulting in clashes with FARDC and the displacement of civilians. Mai-Mai Raia Mutomboki was particularly active in Kabare, Kalehe, Shabunda and Walungu territories, with reports of abductions, looting, extortion and rapes near gold mining sites. On 1 and 2 May 2015, Mai-Mai Raia Mutomboki launched an attack on Kikamba village, Shabunda territory, perpetrating mass rapes, including of one girl. Continuing FDLR activities and direct clashes between FARDC and Burundian armed groups also posed a threat to civilians.

Ituri[1]

10. Despite ongoing FARDC operations against the Force de résistance patriotique de l'Ituri (FRPI), the group continued to pose the greatest threat to civilians in Ituri, with regular attacks against villages and human rights abuses, including against children.

Tanganyika and Haut-Katanga[2]

11. The security situation in parts of the former Katanga Province remained fragile, with attacks against civilians by Mai-Mai Kata Katanga. Reports were received of large numbers of children recruited by the group on 31 July 2016 in Kyalwa village. On 11 October 2016, its leader, Gédéon Kyungu Mutanga, surrendered to the authorities, along with 129 of his combatants, including 11 children. Prior to his surrender, he had been found guilty in 2009 of crimes against humanity, including the recruitment and use of children, and had been imprisoned, before escaping in 2011. The group's activities significantly decreased following Gédéon's surrender.

12. Intercommunal violence between Twa and Luba communities in Manono and Nyunzu escalated in 2014 and spread to neighbouring territories in 2016, prompting waves of displacement, with a total of 631,000 internally displaced persons, as well as 12,000 refugees crossing into Zambia, as at December 2017. The violence fluctuated throughout early 2015, late 2016 and early 2017, with attacks on camps for internally displaced persons, rapes, looting and the destruction of houses and schools, all of which affected tens of thousands of children. Reportedly, Twa and Luba militia killed and maimed over 400 children and recruited and used around 2,000 children for military purposes. A lack of operational capacity, including child protection staff, prevented the verification of such reports.

Haut-Uélé and Bas-Uélé[3]

13. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) came under increasing military pressure from the African Union Regional Task Force and joint FARDC-MONUSCO operations, resulting in decreasing levels of violations against children. LRA remained predominantly active in Dungu, Niangara and Ango territories. Incidents of looting, poaching, banditry and abductions of civilians, including of children, for recruitment purposes continued to be reported and persisted in the context of the drawdown of the Regional Task Force in April 2017.

14. In August 2016, the former Vice-President of South Sudan, Riek Machar, and hundreds of elements of the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition, as well as civilians, including children, entered the country. They were evacuated by MONUSCO from Garamba National Park, at the request of the Government, on humanitarian grounds, and repatriated. As at the end of 2017, 23 unaccompanied children from that group remained in MONUSCO disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, reintegration and resettlement facilities.

Kasais

15. Contested customary power and socioeconomic and political tensions, followed by the killing of tribal chief Kamuina Nsapu by FARDC on 12 August 2016, triggered a major wave of violence in the previously stable Kasais. During the second half of 2016, FARDC clashes with the Kamuina Nsapu, a new militia that emerged in Dibaya territory, in Kasai Central, and FARDC retaliation against civilians suspected of

[1] Formerly part of the Province of Orientale.

[2] Prior to the 2015 redrawing of provincial boundaries, Tanganyika, Haut-Katanga, Haut-Lomami and Lualaba were in the Province of Katanga.

[3] Both provinces were formerly part of the Province of Orientale.

supporting the militia, led to widespread human rights violations, including the recruitment and use of children by the militia, and mass killings and maiming of civilians by all parties to the conflict. In early 2017, the geographic scope of violence expanded and took on an increasingly ethnic dimension, with clashes between Kamuina Nsapu, some of whom have an allegiance to the Luba and Lulua communities, and the emerging Bana Mura/Chokwe-Pende militia, generally comprising individuals from the Chokwe, Pende and Tetela ethnic groups. In the latter half of 2017, while attacks committed by Kamuina Nsapu militia decreased and major FARDC military operations were halted, human rights violations and abuses continued to be recorded, particularly in Kasai Province and along the border with Angola. As at December 2017, the United Nations had identified 88 mass graves in the region. It is estimated that more than 1,000 children have been recruited, used, killed, maimed or raped, and that tens of thousands of children have been deprived of education and medical care.

III. Grave violations committed against children

16. Between 2014 and 2017, over 11,542 grave violations committed against children by over 40 parties to the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo were verified by the United Nations country task force on monitoring and reporting. The figure represents a 60 per cent increase compared to the prior reporting period, from 2010 to 2013, when 7,155 grave violations were verified. At the national level, during the 2014 to 2017 reporting period, the number of new cases of the recruitment of children decreased and the number of separations of children from armed groups increased. The number of cases of sexual violence and killing and maiming peaked in 2015, while the number of abductions and attacks on schools and hospitals peaked in 2017. The total number of violations against children in 2017 increased by 42 per cent compared to 2016.

17. At the regional level, in the east, joint FARDC-MONUSCO operations against FDLR and ADF, power struggles both within and between armed groups, the rise of Mai-Mai self-defence groups and the growing inter-ethnic character of violence in Ituri, Tanganyika, North and South Kivu heavily affected children throughout the reporting period, particularly in 2016 and 2017. In the east, violations peaked in 2016 and decreased in 2017, though they remained at high levels. In the Kasais, the number of grave violations surged from zero in 2015 to 1,425 in 2017, representing 17 per cent of all verified violations during the four-year reporting period. Across the country, in the Kasais, Ituri, Tanganyika, North and South Kivu, children were increasingly targeted on the basis of their ethnicity.

A. Recruitment and use of children

18. A total of 7,736 children (7,125 boys, 611 girls) were verified by the country task force on monitoring and reporting as separated from armed groups and armed forces. The highest number of children separated in 2014 (1,940), with the number decreasing in 2015 (1,765) and in 2016 (1,671). The number of separations increased again in 2017 (2,360) owing to an upsurge in separations in the Kasais. Among these 7,736 children, 6,168 (5,619 boys, 549 girls) had been newly recruited during the reporting period.

19. The number of new cases of the recruitment and use of children dropped at the national level, from 2,085 in 2014 to 1,049 in 2017. Among the new cases of recruitment, 90 per cent occurred in the east, mainly in North Kivu (4,609), followed

by South Kivu (387), Ituri[4] (355), Tanganyika and Haut-Katanga[5] (64). While new recruitment in North Kivu decreased over the reporting period, it increased in South Kivu in 2014 and 2015, before dropping in 2016 and surging again in 2017, reflecting the strengthening of Mai-Mai Raia Mutomboki and Mai-Mai Yakutumba groups. Provinces with previously significant levels of recruitment, such as Haut-Uélé and Bas-Uélé, saw a decrease, reflecting diminished LRA activities in those regions. In the Kasais, new cases of recruitment spiked, from zero in 2015 to 266 children recruited in 2016 and 379 in 2017. Owing to security and logistical constraints, allegations of the recruitment and use of over 2,000 children by different militias in the Kasais, including by Kamuina Nsapu and Bana Mura, have yet to be verified. It is estimated that children may make up as much as 60 per cent of Kamuina Nsapu ranks.

20. Among the cases of new recruitment and use of children, 49 armed groups or unidentified armed elements were responsible for 99 per cent of the cases, with the majority of cases attributed to the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda-Forces combattantes abacunguzi (FDLR-FOCA) (998), followed by Nyatura (803), Kamuina Nsapu (634), Mai-Mai Raia Mutomboki (536), Mai-Mai Mazembe (380), FRPI (304), NDC/Rénové-Guidon (165), Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda-Rassemblement pour l'unité et la démocratie-Urunana (FDLR-RUD) (156), Mai-Mai Charles (ex-Shetani) (153), unidentified FDLR groups (143), Alliance des patriotes pour un Congo libre et souverain (APCLS) (115), and NDC-Sheka (95). The recruitment of 879 children was attributed to unidentified armed elements.

21. Significant progress was made by FARDC in ending and preventing child recruitment and use in its ranks. Seven children were recruited and used by FARDC in 2014, two in 2015, five in 2016 and three in 2017, the last of which constituted cases of use. For instance, four boys aged between 14 and 16 and a 14-year-old girl were abducted by FARDC elements in and around Biakoti Mayi locality (Mambasa territory, Ituri Province) in September 2016 and were used to carry military supplies to the "Mingo Iko" gold mine. They were released three days later. Following MONUSCO advocacy, the commander in charge of the concerned unit of FARDC was suspended and an internal investigation opened, however it is reported that the perpetrator has since resumed his duties. Three boys were recruited and used by the Congolese National Police. For instance, in Haut-Katanga, two boys, aged 16 and 17, were recruited in January 2017 by a Congolese National Police Commander, provided with uniforms and conducted official duties. After advocacy by MONUSCO, they were released and returned to their families in March 2017.

22. More than a third (2,171) of newly recruited and used children were under the age of 15, a war crime under international law. An average of 9 per cent (549) were girls, recruited primarily in the Kasais, North Kivu and Ituri Provinces. This percentage increased over the reporting period, from 7 per cent in 2014 to 12 per cent in 2017, partly owing to the targeted recruitment of girls by Kamuina Nsapu. Although most children were Congolese, cases of cross-border recruitment were also verified: 32 children stated they were from Rwanda, 26 from South Sudan, 25 from Burundi, 10 from Uganda, 3 from the United Republic of Tanzania, 2 from the Central African Republic and 1 from Kenya. In 2017, for the first time, Tanzanian children were documented as having been recruited under false pretences of employment by Mai-Mai Yakutumba.

23. In some instances, children were abducted, for recruitment purposes, from their homes, schools, roads and fields. In other cases, poverty and the lack of opportunities provided incentives for recruitment. Children also joined armed groups in order to protect their communities, as in the Twa and Luba inter-ethnic conflict in Tanganyika.

[4] Including former Province of Orientale.

[5] Including former Province of Katanga.

In multiple cases, children who had escaped or were released from armed groups were rerecruited by the same or different armed groups, sometimes within days of family reunification. Some groups employed initiation rituals, beheading or threatening those who refused to participate. For example, Kamuina Nsapu baptized large numbers of children, in ceremonies that involved machete cuts across the stomach and the consumption of alcohol and red ants. Spurred on by the belief that those children had magical powers and were invincible, Kamuina Nsapu used them as human shields.

24. The percentage of children used as combatants increased from 18 per cent (380) in 2014 to 47 per cent (492) in 2017, with an average of 31 per cent (1,894) of newly recruited children participating in combat. For instance, Kamuina Nsapu and Mai-Mai Yakutumba used between 60 per cent and 80 per cent of children associated with their groups as fighters. Children were used to fight against FARDC, MONUSCO and various armed groups, and forced, in particular by FRPI and ADF, to commit atrocities against civilians. Children were also used in support roles, including as bodyguards, tax and food collectors, porters, cooks, mine labourers, herders, spies and sexual slaves or "wives". Kamuina Nsapu reportedly sent girls as young as 4 years of age to the frontlines as human shields, spurred on by the belief that the girls' magical powers made them invulnerable to bullets.

25. Children recruited and used were also victims of or were exposed to other grave violations, including killing and maiming and sexual violence. At least 56 per cent of newly recruited girls reported experiencing rape, sexual slavery, or forced marriage during their association with armed groups.

Detention of children for their alleged association with armed groups

26. State authorities handed over at least 800 children, including 25 girls, to the country task force on monitoring and reporting, including children who had surrendered to FARDC or were arrested for their alleged association with armed groups. Most children were handed over within days of being initially captured by Government forces. However, at least 95 children were detained for periods ranging between 30 days and one year, in violation of the action plan signed in 2012 by the Government with the United Nations to end and prevent child recruitment and use and sexual violence against children, as well as directives issued in 2013 by the Ministry of Defence and the National Intelligence Agency (Agence nationale de renseignements). For instance, on 22 April 2016, following United Nations advocacy, 24 boys were released from Angenga military prison, Mongala Province, some of whom had been detained for up to one year.

27. Children reported poor detention conditions and, in some cases, in particular in the Kasais, inhumane treatment, including torture. One boy held by FARDC in Gom[illegible] reported being hung from a wall and beaten with bricks, in January 2015. In another incident, on 15 September 2016, FARDC arrested a 14-year-old boy for association with Kamuina Nsapu and hacked at him with machetes, cutting off his thumb and leaving at least 22 scars across his body, including his head and face. In December 2016, six children, aged between 13 and 17, were arrested for their alleged association with Kamuina Nsapu militia and placed in pretrial detention in Tshikapa for more than 10 days, allegedly without access to food, medical care or clothing. Children were also held with adults, as was the case for 27 boys who were released from Kananga prison on 27 December 2017, after spending up to seven months in detention for their alleged association with armed groups.

B. Killing and maiming

28. Conflict-related violence resulted in 1,008 children being killed (327 boys, 170 girls) or maimed (357 boys, 154 girls). In addition, hundreds of reported incidents remain to be verified in the Kasais. Nationwide, the number of children killed and maimed doubled during the reporting period: figures increased from 155 child casualties in 2014, to 156 in 2015, to 363 in 2016 and to 334 in 2017. Regionally, numbers in the east peaked in 2016 (349) with the intensification of conflict and joint FARDC-MONUSCO military operations, before they declined in 2017 (187). In the east, where 84 per cent of all child casualties occurred since 2014, North Kivu was the most affected province, with 547 children killed and maimed. ADF was the main perpetrator in that province, where the group committed a series of brutal massacres against civilians in late 2014, hacking to death at least 35 children. While the Kasais accounted for 16 per cent (165) of all cases of killing and maiming during the full reporting period, the region accounted for 45 per cent (151) of the total cases in 2017. The 88 mass graves identified by the United Nations and anecdotal testimony from children separated from Kamuina Nsapu indicate that the actual number of children killed and maimed in the Kasais is likely to be higher.

29. Armed groups were responsible for over 70 per cent of all cases of the killing (344) and maiming (378) of children. One sixth of child casualties was attributed to ADF (145), followed by Twa militia (87) Mai-Mai Mazembe (83), unidentified armed groups (60), Nyatura (49), FRPI (42) and Kamuina Nsapu (34).

30. Nearly 30 per cent of all cases of killing and maiming of children (290) verified since 2014 were attributed to FARDC (271) and Congolese National Police (19), with 157 children killed and 133 maimed. When the conflict was concentrated in the east, in 2014 and 2015, State agents were responsible for 15 per cent of cases of killing and maiming. With the eruption of violence in the Kasais, the percentage of children killed or injured nationally by State agents jumped to 49 per cent in 2017. Three quarters (126) of deaths and injuries attributable to FARDC in 2017 occurred in the Kasais at the beginning of that year, including through the disproportionate use of force against children. While 9 per cent of verified cases involved children used by Kamuina Nsapu as combatants or human shields, children who were not associated with armed groups were targeted by FARDC in 49 per cent of verified cases. For instance, on 28 March 2017, in Nganza Commune, Kasai Central, 32 children, including 15 girls, were among civilians killed by FARDC during search operations targeting alleged Kamuina Nsapu elements. Whole families — in one home, six children, and in a nearby house, 4-year-old twin girls — were shot dead. On that same night, 10 siblings died when a FARDC element threw a grenade into their house. In the same village, on 27 January 2017, five girls, aged between 12 and 17, were shot and injured by FARDC during choir practice.

31. While most child casualties resulted from gunshot and machete wounds, children were also burned alive or beheaded after refusing to join or attempting to escape armed groups. Children used as combatants by armed groups were often killed or injured on the frontlines. A total of 70 children had to be evacuated by MONUSCO from battlefields. Unexploded ordnance caused the deaths of 33 children and injured 25 children.

32. Ethnic strife played a significant role in the targeting of children in intercommunal reprisals. For instance, on 27 November 2016, Mai-Mai Mazembe, a Nande group, massacred internally displaced Hutu individuals in the Luhanga camp for internally displaced persons, North Kivu, resulting in the deaths of 18 children and the maiming of 14, some as young as 2 years of age.

C. Rape and other forms of sexual violence

33. The country task force on monitoring and reporting verified cases involving 877 children, including 8 boys, who were raped or affected by other forms of sexual violence. Nationwide, the number of cases of sexual violence peaked in 2015 (261), before decreasing in 2016 (225) and 2017 (181). In the east, verified cases dropped by 40 per cent from 2016 to 2017, mirroring the rise and fall in incidents of sexual violence attributed to FRPI. Girls aged 14 and below were affected in 42 per cent of the verified incidents (366). The scale of sexual violence affecting children is believed to be underreported owing to the fear of stigmatization and rejection, as well as the lack of adequate support services for survivors.

34. Armed groups remained the main perpetrators of sexual violence and were responsible for 68 per cent (597) of all verified cases. Among those cases, 17 per cent were attributed to FRPI (148), followed by Mai-Mai Raia Mutomboki (108), Nyatura (38), Mai-Mai Morgan (35), FDLR-FOCA (34) and Bana Mura/Chokwe-Pende militia (17). Dozens of allegations involving Bana Mura were pending verification at the time of writing.

35. A total of 32 per cent of verified cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children (280) were attributed to national security forces, including FARDC (220), the Congolese National Police (55) and the National Intelligence Agency (5). For instance, in January 2017, a 13-year-old girl was raped on her way home by a FARDC officer in Djugu, Ituri Province. While the alleged perpetrator was arrested and detained on the same day, he subsequently managed to escape with the help of a Congolese National Police element.

36. Overall, 94 per cent of cases of sexual violence occurred in the East. North Kivu was the province most affected, with over a third of verified cases of sexual violence (337), followed by Ituri/former Orientale (264), South Kivu (154), Tanganyika and former Katanga (50). In the Kasais, 51 cases were verified. While verified incidents of sexual violence decreased in North and South Kivu, they increased in Tanganyika in 2016. Rape was reportedly used as a tactic of war in the inter-ethnic retaliatory violence between Twa and Luba communities. For example, on 15 December 2016, one Luba boy and three girls were gang-raped by four Twa militiamen near Wabaluba village, outside of Kalemie. While the girls escaped, the boy was reapprehended by the militia and again gang-raped by seven Twa militiamen.

37. Rape, forced marriage and sexual slavery often occurred in the context of other violations, such as the recruitment and use or abduction of children, and were frequently linked to inter-ethnic violence. For instance, between March and May 2017, in Kamonia territory, Kasai Province, Bana Mura/Chokwe-Pende militia abducted 64 Luba and Lulua children (49 girls, 15 boys), forced them to work on farms and raped and sexually abused the girls. In another incident, four girls, aged between 15 and 17, and their two children, were abducted by Twa militia during the Miswaki attack in December 2016. The four girls reported being repeatedly sexually assaulted during their five-month captivity. Sexual violence was reportedly used by both armed groups and national security forces as reprisals against communities perceived to be sympathizing with the opposing side or ethnicity.

38. Boys were also at risk of sexual violence, particularly while associated with armed groups or in detention. While only eight cases involving boys were verified, it is essential to underscore that sexual violence against boys remains underreported owing to social stigma and inadequate services for male victims. For instance, on 13 November 2014, a 16-year-old boy was raped by a FARDC element while detained in Pweto prison, Katanga.

Sexual exploitation and abuse

39. The sexual exploitation and abuse of children by peacekeepers continued to be a serious protection concern in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Information on the allegations received, as well as on measures taken by the United Nations or by Member States, is available online at https://conduct.unmissions.org.

D. Abductions

40. The country task force on monitoring and reporting verified the abduction of 1,288 children (928 boys, 360 girls). Nationwide, the number of abductions more than doubled, from 177 in 2014 to 420 in 2017. In the east, they peaked in 2016 (366) before declining in 2017 (268), predominantly owing to a decrease in the number of cases in North Kivu. At the same time, in the Kasais, the number of abductions spiked from 6 in 2016 to 154 in 2017.

41. Among armed groups, the main perpetrators were Nyatura (191), FDLR-FOCA (141), Mai-Mai Raia Mutomboki (134), FRPI (98), ADF (86), Bana Mura/Chokwe-Pende militia (81) and Kamuina Nsapu (78). Among national security forces, the abduction of 18 children was attributed to FARDC and the abduction of one child to the Congolese National Police.

42. The abduction and recruitment of children were closely linked, with 70 per cent of children (898) abducted for recruitment purposes. Among the children abducted, 14 per cent (176), usually girls, were abducted for purposes of sexual violence. For instance, on 14 June 2014, Mai-Mai Raia Mutomboki elements abducted a 12-year-old girl in Shabunda territory, South Kivu, raping her and forcing her to witness the killing of other children before releasing her. With mining resources increasingly cut off, some armed groups, such as FDLR and Mai-Mai Raia Mutomboki, resorted to abduction as a source of income.

43. Abductions were also linked to inter-ethnic violence. For instance, in January 2017, during an attack on a village in Miswaki, Tanganyika, four Luba girls, aged between 14 and 16, were abducted by Twa militia and taken to a community hall to be executed, before they managed to escape. The children abducted by Bana Mura/Chokwe-Pende (see para. 37 above) were allegedly targeted because of their ethnic affiliation. The militia reportedly changed the children's Luba/Lulua names to Chokwe names.

E. Attacks against schools and hospitals

44. An unprecedented 434 attacks against schools were verified. Over 90 per cent (396) of those attacks occurred in 2017, a drastic increase from 7 attacks on schools in 2014. Children were attacked inside their classrooms or on their way to school, schools were looted or destroyed, and teachers were abducted. In the east, 101 schools were attacked, with incidents rising from 7 in 2014 to 63 in 2017. The attacks were primarily attributed to armed groups, including unidentified armed groups (22), Mai-Mai Mazembe (18), NDC-Rénové (10), FRPI (9) and Mai-Mai Raia Mutomboki (7). Some armed groups, such as Mai-Mai Mazembe, view schools as symbols of the State and therefore specifically targeted them. A total of 8 attacks on schools by FARDC were also verified, in the east.

45. Of all the verified attacks on schools, 77 per cent (333) were perpetrated in the Kasais, with schools burned down, destroyed and pillaged. Reports of hundreds of additional attacks in the region were received but could not be verified at the time of writing. This had a devastating impact on children's access to education across the

Kasais, with at least 35,057 children affected and nearly an entire school year lost. Among the incidents of attacks on schools in the Kasais, 97 per cent were attributed to Kamuina Nsapu (324). The country task force verified multiple cases in which up to 40 children associated with the militia, armed with sticks, machetes and knives, forced students and teachers out of their schools while threatening to behead anyone who continued to study or teach rather than join the militia. Six attacks on schools in the Kasais were attributed to FARDC.

46. A total of 166 attacks against health-care facilities were verified, with 153 attacks attributed to armed groups and 13 to FARDC. In the east, 86 attacks were verified, mainly in North Kivu (52), and attributed to ADF (17), Mai-Mai Raia Mutomboki (11) and NDC-Rénové (9), among others. In the Kasais, 80 health-care facilities were destroyed, looted or otherwise attacked in the last one and a half years, with 73 attacks attributed to Kamuina Nsapu.

47. In both the east and the Kasais, 48 schools and one hospital continued to be used for military purposes, including as barracks, sniper or defensive positions, command centres and observation posts, often transforming them into targets of attacks. Armed groups were mostly responsible for the use of schools and hospitals, mainly Mai-Mai Mazembe (11), Mai-Mai Raia Mutomboki (7) and FDLR (2). State agents also used schools, including FARDC (20) and the Congolese National Police (1). In addition, in February 2016, MONUSCO Intervention Brigade forces in South Kivu occupied a vacant school for five days in Lumbishi, Kalehe, only vacating it following advocacy by the Child Protection Section of MONUSCO. In some cases, the military use of schools led to subsequent attacks by opposing forces. For example, on 12 June 2014, FARDC burned down two primary schools in South Kivu, which had been used as headquarters by Mai-Mai Raia Mutomboki.

F. Denial of humanitarian access

48. Humanitarian access was gravely hampered in areas where armed groups were active and military operations were ongoing. Access constraints, including security incidents and administrative impediments, continued to affect humanitarian assistance for thousands of children. Since 2014, 579 security incidents involving humanitarian personnel have been reported as having occurred in North and South Kivu, including the maiming of 71 humanitarians, the killing of 9 and the abduction of 70, with most incidents occurring in 2015 and 2016.

49. The country task force on monitoring and reporting verified 33 incidents of denial of humanitarian access, primarily in North Kivu (11), South Kivu (7), Ituri/former Orientale (8), Tanganyika (4) and Kasai (3). They were attributed to armed groups, including FRPI (8), unidentified armed groups (7), Mai-Mai Raia Mutomboki and unidentified Mai-Mai groups (4 each), Kamuina Nsapu (2), FDLR, Mai-Mai Charles and Mai-Mai Yakatumba (1 each). Six incidents were attributed to State agents, including FARDC and the Congolese National Police. Cases included the killing of two, the maiming of three and the abduction of seven staff members of non-governmental organizations. For instance, on 9 March 2015, four international non-governmental organization staff were abducted for 48 hours by suspected FDLR elements in Rutshuru territory, North Kivu. The incident led to the closure of a programme benefiting vulnerable children. In another incident, on 18 March 2015, in Beni, North Kivu, Congolese National Police elements forcefully entered a transitional centre for children separated from armed groups and detained an administrator and a guard, who were released on the same day following MONUSCO advocacy.

IV. Progress in addressing grave violations against children

A. Action plans and dialogue

50. Throughout the reporting period, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo showed consistent commitment to implementing the action plan signed in 2012 with the United Nations to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children, as well as sexual violence and other grave violations of children's rights by the armed forces and the security services. Ownership of the action plan was demonstrated through several measures, including through the appointment, in July 2014, of the President's special adviser on sexual violence and child recruitment, the regular submission of reports by the Government to the United Nations on the implementation of the action plan and the meetings and work of the joint technical working group of the United Nations and the Government on children and armed conflict in Kinshasa, which focused on implementing the action plan, through a road map agreed upon in September 2015 and by raising public awareness thereof through a weekly show on Congolese national television.

51. The joint technical working group established seven provincial working groups. Each of the groups developed a provincial road map to address local challenges, such as ending and preventing the detention by security forces of children formerly associated with armed groups or mitigating the risk of rerecruitment. The first provincial working group was established in South Kivu in June 2014, followed by North Kivu and Orientale Provinces. In 2015, provincial working groups were established in Ituri and Katanga, followed by Tanganyika in 2016 and Kananga in June 2017.

52. Developing standard operating procedures on age verification of new recruits was a priority under the action plan. Formally adopted in April 2016, the standard operating procedures were disseminated throughout 2017. During workshops held in Kinshasa, Kananga, Bukavu, Goma, Bunia, Kalemie and Lubumbashi, FARDC was trained on using the standard operating procedures for the screening of new recruits. Significant progress was also made in the provision of access to the country task force on monitoring and reporting to FARDC recruitment and training centres. At least 33,667 new recruits and former armed group elements integrating into FARDC under disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes were screened, as a result of which 432 children were separated before being recruited or integrated. The total included 43 boys screened out from FARDC trainees at the Kamina Training Centre in September 2017. While some of the boys were at the Centre for up to five months and some FARDC elements attempted to hide them, they were not formally enrolled and have since been reunited with their families. FARDC hierarchy provided assurances to the country task force that it will hold accountable those responsible. At least 25,781 FARDC and Congolese National Police elements were trained on child protection and the action plan by the country task force.

53. The progress made by the Government on ending and preventing the recruitment and use of children led to the delisting of FARDC for that violation from the annexes to the 2017 report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (A/72/361-S/2017/821). Those gains need to be sustained, including through the continuous implementation and ownership of the standard operating procedures, the institutionalization of procedures put in place under the action plan and the fight against impunity for child recruitment and use.

54. Aspects of the action plan relating to ending and preventing sexual violence also demonstrated progress, although at a slower rate. On 29 October 2014, the Ministry of Defence issued a directive on sexual violence to FARDC, leading to the

establishment of a commission on the action plan on sexual violence. The commission organized three workshops on the dissemination of the action plan, specifically focusing on combatting sexual violence, in Bunia, Goma and Bukavu, in July and August 2016. A total of 200 high-ranking officers attended the workshops and 50 commanders from the thirty-fourth military region signed declarations committing themselves to combating sexual violence in their respective units. Notwithstanding that progress, gaps remain and efforts need to be accelerated so as to implement this aspect of the action plan.

55. Progress in dialogue with armed groups has been more limited. For instance, MONUSCO engagement with FRPI commanders in January 2015, in order to secure the release of 200 children from their ranks, did not succeed. In 2016, although more than 100 children were handed over by FRPI, the handovers were completed through intermediaries, rather than through formal United Nations engagement with the group. In February 2017, in Kananga, informal dialogue with a Kamuina Nsapu leader resulted in the release of 290 children. In October 2017, MONUSCO began engaging directly with an armed group commander in North Kivu to secure his agreement to release all children from his ranks, end grave violations against children and take concrete, time-bound measures to implement this commitment.

B. Combating impunity

56. During the reporting period, progress was made in holding perpetrators to account for grave violations against children, particularly sexual violence. The country task force on monitoring and reporting documented 195 arrests of alleged perpetrators of grave violations against children, mostly for sexual violence (161). National security forces represented the majority of those arrested, including FARDC (145) and Congolese National Police (39). A total of 11 former armed group members from Nyatura (5), FRPI (2), and NDC-Sheka, Patriotes résistants Mai-Mai (PRM), Mai-Mai Chochi, and Mai-Mai Shetani (1 each) were also arrested. Of those arrested, 116 perpetrators were convicted, including 111 for sexual violence and 2 for child recruitment and use. Those convicted included 88 FARDC and 21 Congolese National Police elements, as well as 7 former armed group elements from ADF and FDLR (2 each), and Mai-Mai Yakutumba, Nyatura and M23 (1 each).

57. While MONUSCO is supporting the Congolese military justice system in holding perpetrators of child recruitment and use to account and ensuring systematic investigation and prosecution, convictions for recruitment remain rare. At the time of writing, 11 former armed group commanders implicated in the recruitment and use of children are in detention,[6] while others remain at large, including Gédéon and Mahanganiko Kasai, alias "Manga", of Patriotes résistants Mai-Mai. These investigations are among 17 priority cases identified by the Government, with MONUSCO support, for the prosecution of war crimes and crimes against humanity, some of which also concern sexual violence and the killing and maiming of children.

58. The country task force on monitoring and reporting continued to advocate with the Government to bring perpetrators from their own ranks to justice. Joint investigations by FARDC and the country task force documented the recruitment and use of 11 children by FARDC colonels Ramazani and Kamulete between 2013 and 2015. Following advocacy by the country task force, colonel Ramazani was charged and put under house arrest in July 2017, before disappearing in August 2017; colonel

[6] Muchoma Bahani, Marcel Habarugira Rangira, Colonel Bigirabagabo, Noheri and Dominique Buyenge alias Domi (Nyatura), Cobra Matata and Zawadi (FRPI), Kakule Muhindo Muhima alias Shetani (Mai-Mai Shetani), Ntabo Ntaberi Sheka (NDC-Sheka), Colonel Kizito (FDLR-FOCA) and Colonel Justin Ilunga (Kamuina Nsapu).

Kamulete also remained at large at the time of writing. While FARDC and MONUSCO jointly investigated the FARDC officer responsible for using five children as porters in 2016 in Ituri, he refused to present himself to summons issued by the Operational Sector Commander and remained on duty.

C. Advocacy and mainstreaming of child protection

59. Throughout the reporting period, the United Nations systematically undertook advocacy and awareness-raising initiatives to end and prevent grave violations against children. This was done through regular interaction with Government representatives at the policy and political levels, as well as engagement with armed groups to secure the release of children from their ranks. The country task force distributed pocket cards to and trained at least 21,740 FARDC and Congolese National Police elements on protecting children from grave violations, including from recruitment and use and sexual violence. Efforts to raise awareness among communities as well as armed groups regarding grave violations also continued, including through leaflet drops and radio messages.

60. In order to amplify those messages, in June 2016 MONUSCO signed a two-year agreement with the national federation of association football (Fédération congolaise de football association) to encourage armed groups to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children, through messages over radio stations, television and social networks. On 10 June 2017, at the opening match of the Africa Cup of Nations, the stadium was covered in banners with the message: "Child recruitment is a crime". In 2016, two well-known basketball players, Bismack Biyombo of the National Basketball Association and Guy Muya of the national basketball team of Belgium, both of Congolese origin, also lent their voices to the fight against child recruitment and use.

61. The Mission's Force took a proactive role in mainstreaming child protection within its operations. In November 2014, it issued a Force Commander directive on the protection of children. Building on the directive, the Child Protection Section of MONUSCO trained 47 gender and child protection focal points of MONUSCO Force in North Kivu and Orientale provinces. The directive was updated on 12 July 2017 to further operationalize child protection in all tactical and strategic Force operations. It assigned specific roles and responsibilities to each Force component and was followed by the appointment of 12 new gender and child protection focal points in each sector and branch of the Force. The country task force trained at least 3,680 MONUSCO Force officers, contingent members and military observers on the protection of children during military operations.

62. From 30 November to 4 December 2014, the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo and travelled to Kinshasa and Goma. The Working Group welcomed the progress made by the Government in implementing the action plan and encouraged it to sustain its efforts, particularly regarding the fight against impunity and sexual violence.

63. In November 2015, MONUSCO launched a thematic public report, entitled "Invisible survivors: girls in armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo from 2009 to 2015", on the recruitment and use of girls by armed groups. On the Day of the African Child, on 16 June 2017, the country task force issued its first quarterly newsletter on children affected by armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which was sent to the Government, United Nations entities, non-governmental organizations, the media and the diplomatic community.

D. Programmatic response

64. The severe lack of funding for programmatic activities had a serious impact on programmes to support child reintegration, family reunification and assistance to child survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. Funding for those activities has consistently decreased every year since 2014. For instance, reintegration support fell, with 2,444 children assisted in 2014, falling to 1,274 children in 2016. More than 8,238 children are still waiting for dedicated reintegration support, with 70 per cent of those children living in North Kivu. In Maniema and Tanganyika, resource constraints limited efforts to determine how many children are in need of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes and to identify those children, and exposed children formerly associated with armed groups to rerecruitment. Assistance to child survivors of sexual and gender-based violence decreased by 71 per cent since the previous reporting period, owing due to a lack of funding.

65. During the reporting period, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and its partners provided services to 12,544 boys and 2,409 girls, including children formerly associated with parties to conflict as well as vulnerable and conflict-affected children from host communities. A total of 6,212 boys and 2,236 girls formerly associated with armed forces or groups received reintegration support, with half of them having received professional training, 28 per cent receiving support to return to school and 21 per cent receiving support to start income-generating activities. A total of 9,121 boys and 1,577 girls formerly associated with parties to conflict were reunited with their families. Assistance was provided by UNICEF in conflict zones to at least 5,425 girls and 159 boys who survived sexual and gender-based violence.

66. As a preventive measure against child recruitment and use, UNICEF supported the birth registration of children within the 90-day legal period, as well as through supplementary judgments if the 90-day period could not be met. Since 2016, UNICEF also promoted the birth registration of children released from armed groups in North Kivu, providing 847 boys and 34 girls with birth certificates

67. In 2016, UNICEF provided access for 250,190 children affected by conflict to quality education and psychosocial support through the construction and rehabilitation of schools and temporary learning spaces and the distribution of education kits. UNICEF also trained 68 focal points and 618 teachers and school inspectors on mine and unexploded ordnance risk education in North and South Ubangi, as well as North Kivu, in July and August 2016.

V. Observations and recommendations

68. I am deeply troubled by the scale and nature of grave violations against children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I urge all armed groups to immediately end and prevent the recruitment and use of children and other grave violations of children's rights and to release all children from their ranks. I call upon them to engage with the United Nations to prepare and implement action plans in line with Security Council resolution 1539 (2004) and subsequent resolutions. I commend the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for its support for such engagement.

69. I am encouraged by the progress made by FARDC on ending and preventing child recruitment and use, which led to their delisting for that violation from the annexes to my previous annual report on children and armed conflict (A/72/361-S/2017/821). I call upon the Government to continue to sustain the gains of the action plan, including through the implementation of standard operating procedures on age

verification, the institutionalization of procedures put in place under the action plan and the fight against impunity for child recruitment and use, including within the ranks of its security forces. I also urge the Government to accelerate the implementation of aspects of the action plan linked to ending and preventing sexual violence by FARDC.

70. I am appalled by the use of children as human shields by some armed groups and militia. I am also greatly concerned by an increase in the number of children killed and maimed by the national security forces, including through the disproportionate use of force and targeting of children in the Kasais. I urge all parties to the conflict to uphold their obligations under international law, put in place concrete measures to mitigate the effect of armed conflict on children, such as a directive on the protection of children by national security forces, and ensure accountability.

71. I welcome the continued access provided to the country task force on monitoring and reporting by the security forces, including to detention centres. I am concerned about the detention and ill-treatment of children for their alleged association with armed groups and encourage the Government to fully implement the directives issued in 2013 by the Ministry of Defence and the National Intelligence Agency. I urge them to treat children associated with armed groups primarily as victims, guided by the principles of the best interests of the child and international protection standards.

72. I welcome the endorsement by the Democratic Republic of the Congo of the Safe Schools Declaration and encourage its swift implementation. I am deeply concerned about the high number of attacks on schools and hospitals, as well as the military use thereof, and urge all parties to the conflict to uphold their obligations under international law, such as the respect of the civilian character of schools and hospitals.

73. I urge the Democratic Republic of the Congo and international partners to ensure that disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes and security sector reforms take into account the rights, specific needs and protection of children affected by armed conflict, and that existing age verification mechanisms are strengthened. The Government should also ensure that girls formerly associated with armed groups are afforded equal reintegration opportunities. I call upon Member States and the donor community to provide additional resources to support the release and reintegration of children.

74. I commend the initiative by MONUSCO Force to adopt a directive on the protection of children and encourage its full implementation.

75. I am very concerned by the severe lack of funding for humanitarian assistance and programmatic child protection activities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its serious impact on child reintegration, family reunification and assistance to child survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. I urge the donor community to increase assistance in those areas and to also provide the necessary financial resources to support the work of the United Nations in monitoring and reporting, action plan implementation and engagement with listed armed groups, with a view to ending and preventing grave violations against children.